ERIC Document Resume | See Instruction Sheet | DATE OF RESUME | DATE RECEIVED

A. PUBLICATION DATA

1. ACCESSION NUMBER: ED001684
2. ORIGINATOR CONTROL NO(S).: NA
3. IDENTIFICATION NO.: NA

DO NOT WRITE IN SPACE BELOW

4. AUTHOR(S): Miller, S. M., and Ira E. Harrison

5. TITLE OF DOCUMENT ABSTRACTED: Types of Dropouts: "The Unemployables"

6. PUBLICATION TITLE: NA

7. EDITOR(S): NA

8. PLACE OF ORIGIN: ORG. Annual Meeting, American Orthopsychiatric Association, ST. Washington, D.C. CITY, STATE

9. PUBLISHER OR SOURCE: Syracuse University Youth Development Center, Syracuse 10, New York

10. VOL.	11. PAGES	12. MO./YR.	13. TOTAL PP.
NA	NA	Mar 63	27

TELE. EXT. INST/LOC CODE

MICROFILM COPY AVAILABLE: YES ☒ NO ☐

COPYRIGHT GRANTED: YES ☐ NO ☒

COPYRIGHT RELEASE FILED: YES ☐ NO ☐

TYPE OF REPORT: PROPOSAL ☐ IN-PROGRESS ☐ FINAL ☒ FOLLOW-UP ☐

OTHER ERIC REFERENCES:

ERIC SATELLITE CODE

B. INDEXING DATA

14. SUBJECT AREA

15. TYPE OF ENDEAVOR: survey

16. INDEXING TERMS (6-12)

school dropouts	parent attitudes	career aspirations		
secondary schools	student problems	student motivation		
student attitudes	unemployment	Syracuse University Youth Development Center		
		Syracuse, N.Y.		

17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

An interview was conducted involving 50 boys (37 white and 13 Negro) under 18 years of age who had left school and were having difficulty obtaining or keeping jobs. The purpose of the project was to discover their attitudes toward school life, authorities and parents as well as their personal aspirations and problems.

In response to a series of questions about school, the boys indicated that they were pushed out of school, due to teacher misinterpretations. A high school diploma was recognized as a necessary credential for many jobs, though not as an aid in the performance of these jobs.

The dropouts found great difficulty in linking the "now" world, that of present conditions, to that of the "if" world, the world of possible conditions. Parents shared the same orientation to jobs as did the boys. The boys felt that external causes over which they had little control were responsible for the problems they faced. They seemed to respond to criticsm in a very personal way.

ERIC No.

18. SOURCE OF ABSTRACT

C. FUNDING DATA

19. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION

20. DIVISION OR DEPT.

21. CONTRACT NO.

PROJECT NO.

22. TOTAL COST OF PROJECT

23. DURATION OF PROJECT

U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
Office of Education

ERIC Form 1

ED001684

J+M

INFORMATION RETRIEVAL CENTER ON THE DISADVANTAGED
Ferkauf Graduate School of Education, Yeshiva University

TYPES OF DROPOUTS: "THE UNEMPLOYABLES"

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Presented at the Annual Meeting of the
American Orthopsychiatric Association, Washington, D.C.

March, 1963

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TYPES OF DROPOUTS: "THE UNEMPLOYABLES"[1]

A good indication of our lack of understanding of dropouts[2] and the dropout process is the absence of a typology of dropouts. The literature on dropouts abounds in discussion of "the dropout," ignoring the great variations which exist among dropouts. The limited efficacy of dropout prediction instruments suggests that dropouts differ considerably in their characteristics and that the process of dropping out takes many different routes. Most dropouts are from relatively low-income families but a considerable percentage are not; for many dropouts it is possible to see an early pattern of school difficulty and adjustment, but many others have not been retarded in school. The prospects of dropouts also are varied; an investigation of Syracuse dropouts two years after leaving school shows that one of five males is able to attain a white-collar or skilled job. These and other studies show that dropouts have experiences and characteristics both before and after leaving school.

There is urgent need for a typology of dropouts and of the processes of dropping out; we have had many studies of the properties of dropouts and few of the process of dropping out. In this paper, we deal with one type of male dropout -- those who have left school and are thought to be "unemployable." Our analysis of the attitudes of these boys largely ignores the outside world which determines their fate; in other work we have concentrated on economic and political aspects of school dropout problems.[3] In this paper, we are moving to a discussion of the attitudes of these boys rather than to the conditioning events and to the economic structure.

facilitates or retards their economic advance

We have interviewed 50 boys (37 white, 13 Negro) under the age of 18 who have left school, have had difficulty in obtaining or keeping jobs, have gone to the New York State Employment Service in Syracuse for placement help and have been classified by the office as "presently unemployable" in the Syracuse labor market.[4] They have been referred to a work and training program sponsored by the Onondaga County Youth Board and the New York State Division for Youth. These are boys who have had decidedly more economic and social difficulties than is true of the Syracuse dropout group as a whole.[5] While one-quarter of those in our census of 1959-60 dropouts was known to have been apprehended by police, at least two-thirds of our "presently unemployable" dropouts have had police records and many have been in penal institutions. The fathers of about a fifth of the boys are dead. This, of course, is a remarkably high figure. Of the surviving fathers, less than half live with their families. Several boys have been brought up in foster homes. Mothers support one-quarter of all the families. At least 60% and possibly 90% of the families have been on welfare at one time or another. Public assistance is much more frequent among Negroes than whites.

We are dealing with a difficult group of dropouts who probably pose the gravest kinds of problems; we have called them "unemployable" dropouts to distinguish them from other types of dropouts. In turn, it is important to recognize, as we have only partially done in this paper, that there are important variations among them.

School

In response to a series of questions about their attitudes towards school a small half of our dropouts declared that they did not drop out of school but were asked or forced to leave. An example from an interview:[6]

I: Why did you drop out of school?
NDO: I didn't drop out of school. They dropped me.
I: Why did they drop you?
NDO: Well, when they dropped me there were a few other boys.
I: How was it possible for you to remain in school?
NDO: Oh, it was impossible for me to stay in school. I had to go down to Board of Education and see Dr. ---, and he said that all my actions indicated that I didn't want to stay in school. So by going to night school and passing in my grades in March, maybe by next September I'd be allowed to get back into day school.

They would have stayed in school, if this pressure had not been exerted on them. They define themselves as "pushouts" rather than "dropouts." Obviously such reporting cannot be taken at face value, and undoubtedly many acted so as to incite action to expel them from school, whether or not they intended that result or not. Most have been suspended from at least two schools. The pattern is generally a great deal of residential mobility so that many have attended eight different schools before leaving school in the tenth grade. In school they miss their friends and acquaintances frequently. They report of these friends and where 'wise around' and sometimes it is possible for them to have done this as well. As one boy explained it:

I: What did you like about school?
NDO: The only thing I like about school was recess and lunch.

I Recess and lunch, huh?
WDO Yeah
I Okay. What didn't you like about school?
WDO Really to come right down to it, you know, I really didn't dislike school. I just didn't have time to do my work. I was always monkeying around. I think that was my biggest downfall. I think that if I hadda kept my mouth shut in class, you know, and never mind about my buddy next door, I wouldda got along okay. I don't know.

"Wise around" can include talking out loud, laughing, throwing paper, hitting students, drinking whisky. This action frequently ends in trouble -- reprimands by the teacher, being grabbed or shoved by the teacher, having to stay after school, stand in a corner, or sent to the principal's or counselor's office. A boy explained his school departure in the following way:

I Why did you come back up here?
WDO You see I was getting kind of old. You see they don't take anybody up to sixteen. That's all. When I went back to this (rural school) everything was going great. You see they got this new principal and this new principal wouldn't take it from the old principal about me, so he figured he'd try me out. So I was good. No trouble or nothing. Then all of a sudden one day this kid comes up and slugs me as hard as he could on the back. They'd been doing this because I'm from the city and they don't like city kids.
I City? What city?
WDO Oh, this city (Syracuse) and New York. I told them I'd been down to New York and they don't like it. And so they kept on hitting me as hard as they could. Then this one guy come up and hit me as hard as he could and then moved back. I turned around and swung and he moved and I hit the teacher and that was it.
I What do you mean he moved? Where was the teacher?

WDO The teacher was standing in back of him You see we were lined up and going down to the gymnasium and this kid was in back of me and he let me have it You go by height and in the line I was near the end and the teacher was after you So when this kid let me have it

I Your back was turned?

WDO Yes. I was facing front And he let me have it in the middle of the back. And so

I The teacher didn't see him hit you?

WDO Yes. But the teacher didn't say nothing Or he didn't have time Once he hit me I let him have it.

I What happened then?

WDO He dragged me down to the office and that was it

I Did you tell your side?

WDO I told my side

I What did the principal say?

WDO He says he didn't believe me but it would be better for me to get out [7]

Sometimes, the principal suspends them from school. And sometimes it is two or three days before dropouts' parents discover that their child has been suspended. The dropout, however, usually returns to school or is able to re-enroll unless his sixteenth birthday is near. If this is the case he is usually not returned to school or, if they have past offenses, not permitted to re-enroll

This picture has been reported frequently in other communities. We want to make two comments which seem not to have been reported elsewhere

(1) The boys are aggrieved by school; they frequently contend that they were not immediately involved in the event for which they have been kicked out and the teacher's misinterpretation of what was occurring lead to their involvement in the event leading to their school dismissal.

They see the school personnel as "bugging" them, constantly be-

after them until they finally have to turn to defend themselves. The following excerpt relates this feeling:

I see. Now, do you feel any teachers were unfair to you?
WDO No. They were all fair to me.
I Did you have any teacher that you didn't like?
WDO No. Up to a certain point.
I Well, tell me about it.
WDO I had an English teacher. He was a man too. Ah. I was doing my best to work, you know and he always kept telling me I hadda do better and he kept after me. So one day I told him off and walked out of class and never went back.

We shall return to the "bugging" question later.

(2) The boys, to our initial surprise, were not negative about school. School is a convenient place for meeting one's friends, and they miss it for this reason frequently. In reply to a question about the "fairness" of teachers, most indicated that they felt that teachers were fair. These excerpts from our interview indicate the general feeling of fairness:

I What do you like about school?
NDO I like going to school. I enjoyed going to school, yeah. I don't know whether or not it was so much what I was learning, but I enjoyed going to school. One year I went to school every day and I still failed...
I Was there anything about school that you didn't like?
NDO No. Not really. Only a few teachers. From time to time...

I Could you tell me something about the teachers that you mentioned before? What kind of people become teachers?
NDO More or less people who enjoy working with children or get some sort of a good feeling

about helping young people and regardless of who they are

I Do you feel that any of your teachers you had in school were unfair to you?
ND Oh, all my teachers were fair to me.
I Weren't any unfair?
ND No. Not really

Further, many volunteered that some particular teacher had been particularly fair or interested in them. Yet, as one boy expressed it, "School and I just aren't friends."

What has struck us is that in a dropout population that has been particularly afflicted with school problems, there was not a pronounced rejection of school. Perhaps in retrospect after a difficult experience in the work-world they romanticized school but the important thing in terms of educational policy is to see the possibilities in their views. The youth are perplexed by school because it places great constraints on their behavior, is not intrinsically interesting and does not have visible connection with the actual content of jobs on the outside. They recognize, however, that a high school diploma is a necessary credential for many jobs, though not an aid in these jobs.

The formal organization of schools may be an obstacle. One dropout was absorbed by drawing. When he could not continue his art classes because he was doing poorly in all his other classes, he left school. School personnel are perplexed by what they see as school-antagonism on the part of these youth but the latter do not reject school out-of-hand. Teach

administrators and difficult students have not learned how to become "friends," but there is more of a potential for this on the dropouts' side than has been realized. As one of the boys replied when asked "How important is school," "Well I can't rightly say. I've never had a chance to know what school really is."

Now that they are out of school and have experienced the difficulties of the labor market the majority of boys wished they had not left school, although many do not see on what basis they could have remained in that environment. It may be that once boys in 8th grade or later have begun to move onto the school-leaving track, little will keep them in school. Perhaps it is after they have entered the labor market and tasted its possibilities and pitfalls that they then offer the greatest potential for satisfactory school performance. But in very few cities is there the flexibility which permits readmission anytime during the year and provides special programs for the returnees.

Ninety per cent of our dropouts liked the following school subjects: math, science, physical education, art, and shop. English and social studies were courses our dropouts had the most difficulties with; they were dull and uninteresting. The potential of these generally disliked courses is revealed by a Negro dropout whose social studies teacher had the class "act out" historical events. He relates:

> You might think it was crazy, but you actually felt that you were there, at the Boston massacre. Now, why can't other teachers do that?

The great interest in science fields among our male dropouts and the "culturally deprived" generally has not been developed. Martin Mayer

pointed out that it is regrettable that the innovational programs in science teaching are mostly beamed at the elite schools, public and private, rather than to the slum schools where they might capture the imagination of youth who find many school subjects uninteresting but not those in science.

It is constant reporting that many dropouts are too poor in mathematics to be able to benefit from advanced vocational and technical training underscores the inadequacy of science teaching.

Almost 10% of the boys feel that a high school education is all that is necessary for them. They seem to tailor their occupational expectations and consequently their educational to what they can reasonably get.

The "Now" and the "If" Worlds

The question of occupational and educational aspirations and expectations has become very cloudy in contemporary analysis. How realistic are the aspirations of our boys? On questions which ask what they would like to be, implying that they should not consider immediate limitations, they often indicate high aspirations and hopes. If they had their choice, white dropouts would become factory owners, majors in the army or air force, mechanics, truck drivers, and factory workers. Negro dropouts, if they had their choice would become doctors, lawyers, scientists, majors in the army, and garbage collectors. On questions that deal with what they are expecting to do in some immediate time span, they are very rooted in reality. Forty-eight per cent of the dropouts have a specific job aspiration (mechanic, etc.), 8% of our dropouts have a very specific job, place, and time in mind (e.g., a forest ranger in the State), 6% of our dropouts state a broad area of work in mind

skilled, semi-skilled, e g , construction work, etc), 3% of our dropouts were inconsistent (one time mentioning one job, later, another, e g lawyer, construction worker); 10% were diffuse with respect to type of job (no response or "don't know"), and for the remaining 20% future job expectations were unclear, not obtained or impossible to classify They frequently indicated the means by which they expect to get to these occupations Job expectations were realistic and related to their experiences

A number of boys responded to questions about whether they would like to enter certain occupations negatively because "I can't get that kind of job " "I don't have the brains for it " When asked whether they would like to have it, they repeated that they could not obtain such a position In this excerpt, the interviewer is eliciting responses to a series of pictures involving work activities

I	Okay What about this type of job? What is going on here?
(VD)	Mailman
I	Do you like that type of work?
(VD)	Nah
I	Why not? What's the matter with that?
(VD)	I don t know the city that good

They find it difficult to think in terms of an abstract job that they might like or dislike apart from the possibilities of their attaining it.

Many of the boys do profess a concern with high-level occupations which they have little chance of achieving One boy spoke about the possibilities of becoming a doctor, if he applied himself. Another would like to be an artist Yet this boy who prided himself on his vivid dream-world, was sharply

of what was fantasy and what was the life of the possible. Another boy related his hopes and fears:

I Well, just how important is school to you? School in general, how important is it to you?
NDO It's very important to me.
I Why?
NDO Because I figure I'm going to need a job and everything, so that's why. . because I might be getting married pretty soon so that's why I gotta go to college. See, I want to be a doctor, but I doubt if I'll ever be though.
I Why is this?
NDO Cause I might not finish school. See I want to finish high school and go on to college
I Why might you not finish?
NDO Might get in some more trouble or something. I'm trying not to though.
I Why might you get in some more trouble?
NDO Might get in with the wrong boys.
I How is this going to come about?
NDO No. . when you. . see, you see I live on Grace Street and I always stay up there but then sometimes I come down on Henry Street. Then the kids down there, they be rowdy and I be with them and then they get in trouble and the next I know, the cops got us.

The world of today, the "now" world is a world of concretes, of boundaries, of limited possibilities among which one can roam. But the "if" world is -- the world of what might happen, the world of the possible rather than the world of the probable, and that is seen quite differently. For in the world of the possible, one might get the lucky breaks, or settle down for the training which is necessary. But for almost all the boys, the important world is the "now" world; when they think of the "if" world, they are aware that it is not "now" and that they have to live immediately in the "now" world.

I You can't complain about what?

WDO About what kind of job I get right now. If I get a job, that's it. Later on in life, cleaning and sweeping, I'm not going to have that kind of job later on. It's a job. What can I do. I can't complain. Later on I'm not saying that I'm going to be a real businessman but I'll make a go of it. When I finish school, I'll be in better hands, let's say of getting a job. Maybe not getting it, but it will be a help

I Are you going to school now?

WDO Yes.

I Where?

WDO I'm attending night school.

I When do you expect to finish high school?

WDO About another year and a half

I Then what are you going to do?

WDO Most likely go into the service

I What branch?

WDO Air Force.

I What are you going to take up?

WDO Administration.

I What kind of administration?

WDO Clerical work.

I Good. What do you think you'll be doing 10 years from now?

WDO Well, what I'd like to be doing is, I don't know. After I get in the service and if they train me in the field that I like, I don't know. I may go on and take up some kind of business course, after I'm finished with the service and go in the business field, which I want to do, but I'm undecided right now.

I Good. Now, is there any job that you wouldn't take right now?

WDO No. I'd take any job right now.

While most of the boys think more education would be desirable for them (and generally) the amount of education which they see as helpful is not very great. A high school diploma is enough in their eyes because they have gauged their occupational expectations on a scale of the "now."

I What is your idea of a good job? For a boy your age?

NDO Wash dishin' machine. (dishwasher)

I Say what?

NDO Wash dishin' machine.
I Anything else?
NDO No.
I Why is this a good job?
NDO Because it's what I figure I could get.

The kind of jobs they want has real likelihood for them and their present day educational aims are not out of line with these modest but realistic goals. These are not boys looking to conquer the world and expecting the easy buck. They see themselves as working and are willing in the main to accept what would generally be deemed low wages. Perhaps after marriage when they become more fully cognizant of the problems in attempting to support a family at this low income, their views might change. Our guess is that most will not, rather they will scale what they expect close to what can be achieved.

It is not that they are satisfied with too little. What they would be satisfied with is always greater than they now have. What they actively want is in the realm of their possible world. We detect what appears to be a self-protecting element of not investing emotionally in the "now" world, things that can be obtained only in an "if" world. It is not that many things are not wanted but that there does seem to be some hesitation in soaring freely in thinking about the "now" world. The following are excerpts from one interview:

I Well, you've sort of confused me now . . . First you tell me that you like office jobs and then you start talking about construction and now you started telling me about G.E. Now, first I'd like to know what job you'd like to have?
NDO I'd like to have the one out to G.E. cause some of them people out there work in offices, some of them don't.

I G.E Doing what? What would you like to do at G E ?

NDO I mean fix tubes, meters and all, fix you know, bulbs and all that other stuff. I'd like to be in one of them kind of jobs

I In other words, you really want to be a factory worker You really don't want to be in office work. You want to be in factory work.

NDO Yes.

I All right. When you think about work or working, what first comes to your mind?

NDO The first thing that comes to my mind would be a dishwashing job

I Why a dishwashing job?

NDO I just want to work in a restaurant, that's all, instead of being out in the cold

I Why don't you want to be a chef or cook? Why do you want to be a dishwasher?

NDO I'd like to be a cook, too, but I don't know how to cook

. . .

I Do you think the fact that you have a record will keep you from getting a job?

NDO I couldn't work in no office, nobody might not trust me. I couldn't work in no school cause that's where they teach the kids. Cause they might think I teach them how to steal or something. I couldn't work in no construction work or work in a restaurant or work in a bakery or something like that.

I I noticed earlier that one of the first jobs you said that you wanted was an office worker and I noticed when I started asking you about it, you forgot about it Why did you do this?

NDO Cause I know I can't get no job in an office. Nobody would let me work in no office. Cause I have a record.

. . .

I All right. Which job would you like to have of any jobs on the list? Shall I read them again? Okay Teacher, janitor in a building, sales clerk in a small store, carpenter, garbage collector, lawyer, factory worker, a bus boy in a restaurant. Which

would you rather have?
NDO I'd rather be a lawyer.
I Why a lawyer?
NDO Well, a lawyer see, a lawyer, he have a steady job unless somebody try to take his contracts or something and he has a steady job and he helps people what get in trouble. People what try to do something to him, he get to try to get out, try, if they get, if they have 10 years, well, he'll try to get it broken down to five or three...
I Do you think you'll become a lawyer?
NDO Unless I go to school and take up lawyer.
I Can you do that?
NDO No.
I Why can't you?
NDO Well, I ain't, don't have no money to go, see after you go to high school, you have to go to college, some kind of law college, you gotta take up law in college and I don't have enough money to pay to get through.

Our impression is that there is no effort to bring the "now" and "if" worlds together. It is not a process of alleviating a cognitive dissonance but an effort at perseverating the two worlds, keeping them apart with little interplay among them. Obviously, mistakes may be made. A "now" job possibility may really be only an "if" chance.

I Why is it the best job?
WDO The florist would have been the best. After a while I would have gotten a raise, man, it would have been pretty good. I would have got good money after a while. I had to work myself up. I would have been doing pretty well if I was working there. This is the next best, the one I'm working now.
I Well, what's the future in this job you have now? (sales clerk in produce market)
WDO Ah...ah...I don't know.
I Does this job have any future -- that you're working on now?
WDO I might become a manager some day -- something like that.
I What do you think your chances are?

WDO Of becoming a manager? I don't know What do you think?

One implication of this analysis is that the enlarging or raising of aspirations and expectations has only limited value. If coping with the world frequently consists of riding with it rather than directing it, of accepting its concrete possibilities as goals rather than harboring higher goals which are constantly frustrated then the attacks must be of a different order. It would be necessary to raise possibilities somewhat in order to encourage more thinking about the "if" world by transmuting part of it into the "now" world. Experiences with acquaintances or neighbors who have obtained high school or college diplomas but have not been able to do well occupationally reduces the willingness to believe that the "if" world can be incorporated into the "now" world. What we are saying may apply only to our specific group of dropouts who have had more job difficulties than others, but undoubtedly some elements of this thinking is found among many other types of dropouts.

Parents

Parents have the same orientations to jobs as the boys. They want their sons to get a job: "Anything that he can do." They seldom state a specific job, just any job that the boy can get. One parent indicated an important school problem: "It is embarrassing for a kid his age remaining in the 8th grade. I let him quit. I want him to get a job working 8 hours a day, so he can be home at night."

Several parents express a feeling of not being able to direct the boys. Once the boys are "grown up," they can not be treated like kids and told [illegible] to do. Words are not effective with them and physical force -- freque[illegible]

important in regulating child behavior in working-class families -- is no longer easily usable with fully grown boys. A substitute force has not developed nor is it always thought to be desirable to pressure the youth into a given direction.

Hylan Lewis[8] has described a somewhat similar orientation among some Negro mothers in Washington:

> As children grow older there seems to be a cut-off point at which parents express impotence and bafflement. Although there are anxieties, the fate of these growing children is often written off as out of parents' hands. There recurs in the records a mixture of hope and resignation: "I do hope they don't get in trouble I tried to raise them right." "The Lord will have to look out for them." "I'm glad mine are little. I kinda hate to see them grow up. At least I can do something for them now."

Orientations to Problems

We were concerned to see to what extent this group of "unemployable" dropouts identified their problems as products of their behavior or as essentially arising from external causes over which they had little control. We classified as "impunitive" responses those that indicated self-deprecatoriness, tendency to blame self for outcomes and the like and as "extrapunitiveness" responses in which others are blamed, causes are seen as external or problems are not perceived. (The distribution had to be dichotomized into two such omnibus categories because of the small number of cases.) We estimate that 55% of the boys were impunitive and 45% extrapunitive. Since many, if not most, of these boys would be classified as

"acting out," these results raise further questions about that overworked and overstretched category. Similarly it raises questions about the category of "sociopathic personality" and the like which presumes a lack of concern for social values that does not seem to be exhibited by these boys

Our Negro dropouts showed a higher incidence of extrapunitiveness than did the white dropouts. While 40% of whites are extrapunitive, 55% of the Negroes were so classified. The Negro dropouts may have a point here in identifying outside pressures as causing difficulties. Negro graduates of the work-training program have had great difficulties getting jobs while white graduates have done much better. The training program does not primarily provide any skills, it has been mainly aimed at developing a more positive orientation towards work. Improving the outlook of whites seems to enhance their chances of getting low-level interstitial jobs, but not those of Negroes. The latter seem to know this and are less willing to take low-level jobs in the hope of being able to move up. White boys have this hope; Negro boys see the first job as the terminus, not as the gateway station to further occupational advance. Similarly, many white dropouts are willing to become policemen but almost no Negro is -- it is a dirty job in their experience as they have seen what they consider to be prejudiced behavior against them.

A frequent explanation of difficulties, especially with police, employers or school, is that someone was "bugging me." Two examples of "bugging":

I What did they (teachers) do when they picked on you?

NDO Like sometimes, you know, I ain't doing nothing, they just start bugging me. They just started

talking and all this trash.

I What did they say?

NDO Oh, like, what you doing, do your work and all that. Sometimes I can't quit talking 'cause I ain't been talking and it be somebody else that been talking.

I Anything else you dislike about school?

NDO No

I Why did you drop school?

NDO I got expelled.

I Can you tell me about that?

NDO Well, you see, I was getting in a little bit of trouble, so one day, in the cafeteria; you know they have teachers that be in there, so this one teacher, he thought I snuck ahead in line but I didn't, so when I got up to get my milk, he told the boy not to give it to me, and then, so I said something, so then he grab me and then, you know, we sort of tussled a little bit and then I had to go down to the principal's office and he, ah, he, ah, Mr ----, the principal, he expelled me. He kicked me out.

I Why did you leave school?

WDO Got sick and tired of school.

I Got sick and tired of school? How did you get sick and tired of school? What happened?

WDO Oh, the teachers keep on bugging me.

I "Bugging" you?

WDO Yes.

I How do teachers "bug" students. I have heard this expression time and again. But I don't understand what it is. How do teachers "bug" a student?

WDO They push me around, or something like that.

I Push you around how?

WDO Shove me or something.

I Where do they shove you? Who shoves you?

WDO The teachers.

I Why do they shove you?

WDO I talked in class or something like that. Fooled around a couple of times.

I Why do you think they did that?

WDO Oh, they got mad at me, and pushed me around so I started pushing them around.

These boys frequently report the precipitating incident for their getting kicked out of school or being fired from a job was a situation in which they were not deliberately trying to do something wrong. (The earlier excerpt from the interview with the New York City boy in a rural school is a good example.) Someone was constantly nagging them, misinterpreting what they were doing; the adults' misperception led to the action which the adults feared.

WDO Well, the teachers were okay up until the 7th grade. Then they started getting down my neck.
I How they'd get down your neck?
WDO Well, it started out when I moved into the 7th grade and there was a bunch of guys I knew that had failed. They were in my class. We started monkeying around and the teachers started to get mad.
I Monkey around with you?
WDO Yes.

WDO Ug oh boy... I can't right remember her name but it will come back to me. She was my home-room teacher in ----School and.. well, she always jumped on all the boys' necks. It's like when we had study hall and when we had to go back to our room for a study hall 7th period and we did all our work during the class and she tell us to do anything we want. We go over and start talking to the girls; we start asking them questions and things like that, she started jumping on the boys necks about that. Then she goes down to the principal and say we were molesting her. And I didn't like that a bit
I Is that the worst teacher you've had?
WDO Oh boy, that's the worst teacher I've had yet -- ever had.
I Has she ever hit you or anything like that?
WDO She's hit me. One time she wish she hadn't.
I With what? Why did she hit you?
WDO I was... well, she told us to do anything we wanted to cause I did my...we only had English homework one night and I did that all during English class. We have...I think it's 15 minutes at the end of the

> class there to do our homework or anything like that or any homework we've got. so I did all my homework in that 15 minutes so she told us that if we were tired, to lay our heads down on our desk or something like that, so I laid my head down on the desk and she come over with a ruler and hit me in the back of the neck just as hard as she could and that hurt too. She cut me with the edge of the ruler there So I got up and hit her.

The boys in using this mode of explanation do not claim that they had always been good-little-conformists; no, they had been in trouble before but the incident which led to their exile was not initiated by them

They saw the adults' behavior in the situation as "unfair," falsely accusing them and this seems to provide a basis for neutralizing the norms which restrain behavior in school or in the job world. Perhaps more importantly they see many supervisory adults as "buggin" them, always "buzzing around," "riding" them, going "after them," looking for trouble even when it is not there The boys frequently recognize that they are doing things which are difficult for teachers or bosses to accept but they do not do them to antagonize. These outcomes are the result of trying to have a good time, "kidding around" and the like. The constant nagging and riding, which is their interpretation of what is taking place, is thought of as "picking on" them and excessively irritating. Yet, they accept the idea of structure and discipline; it is the particular form of it which "bugs" them. They see the adult mode of control as entrapment: "They're after me all the time" until I finally get real angry and do something that is too much.

Yablonsky[9] reports the poignant feeling of being "bugged":

The essential meaning of the "permanent" clubroom to the gang was revealed by Jay. He would come regularly, pay his ten-cent dues, then go and lie down in a corner on the floor and stare quietly at the ceiling. One day I questioned him about what seemed to be a waste of money:

L.Y.: Jay, how come you pay your dime and just lie around? Why don't you play checkers or talk to the guys or something?

Jay: Look, man, this is the only place in the world they leave me be. Don't bug me. I hang on the corner or the park -- the cops boot me. I go home -- they throw me out. They don't let me in the (community) center no more. I hang in my hallway -- the janitor yells. I go on the stoop -- the neighbors bitch. I get a little peace here -- so leave me be.

In the job world, the boys frequently mention that they have been fired because one boss wanted them to do one thing; another, a different thing and they got fed up and told off the boss.

> Makes me sick. I got so many bosses, I don't know who to mind. Even the bus boys had bus boys. "You bus that table!" "No, I want you to bus that table! Come over here and bus this table." So I said, "Don't none of you say nothing to me. If you do, we're going to fight. I'm not taking any orders from anybody but the big boss. If I see something that needs to be done, I'll do it."

The precipitating incident is again that of a false accusation of aberrant behavior. Yet, here again as in the school situation, they accept the idea of authority and supervision. It is its concrete manifestation with which they have difficulty.

I Is it ever really necessary for someone to give orders?

NDO Yes, if nobody don't give no orders and everybody do what they want to do, somebody might not do the right thing.

Another boy:

I Well, is having someone give orders ever really necessary?

WDO Well, in ways it is and in ways it isn't. Because, let's say, one guy gives you orders and you go to do it and another guy gives you orders when you're just doing this one. When you're doing the other one, the other one come by and ask you why you aren't doing this one and then you get all mixed up and then you..

I That happen to you?

WDO It happened to me six times

I Where was this?

WDO This company. Till the 7th time, I got sick and I slammed him. I gave him a black eye and a bloody nose. He said I was fired and I said, sorry, I quit two minutes ago and I want my check and he said he wasn't going to give it to me. So I took it to the labor board and I got $20 extra.

The frequency with which contradictory orders may be involved may be due to these boys' working in situations (like restaurants) where work rationality is limited and the organizational structure leaky. Their jobs are frequently in establishments where there is not a well-formalized work situation. (One action suggestion would involve setting up regularized grievance systems in places which employ many youths. Training programs might experiment with providing a neutralized mode of handling grievances.)

A central tension is that the boys seem to take criticism in a very personal way (not that all of us do not have difficulty in separating criticisms of our products from criticisms of ourselves). It is all right for a boss to exert authority -- that's what being a boss is -- but that is not the same t

criticizing me, telling me what is wrong with what I do, especially if such comments are made in heat

What does it mean to accept criticism? Is it considered a sign of weakness to let someone get away with it? Or is it taken as a sign of total rejection by the adult? Or as an effrontery and an invasion of privacy? We do not know: we suspect that the boys are asking for respect, a "rep," a status which we adults tell them has to be earned. But the boys frequently are not sure it is worthwhile to try to earn it, if it is not first accorded them

The Structure of Opportunity

John Miner reports that all but 15% in unskilled occupations are capable of working in higher-level occupations. Lockwood in Baltimore reports that only 5% of high school students overstate their occupational potential while 37% understate it. With the growing emphasis on formal credentials, a sizable number of people will never be able to move close to what they can do and have a chance to obtain a decent income.

A touching story of his travails is told by a boy whose father is in a mental hospital:

> WDO No. I quit. I went to school in September, 1962, this year. I started in September. I guess it was just about the end of the month, I quit. And then . . the reason why I quit was that my mother wanted me to help her out. So I went to work and I lost a job. I was laid off. So then I couldn't find another job. My mother asked me to go back to school so she could get welfare assistance for me. So I went back to school. And then when I went back to school, I just completely lost interest in it, you know, didn't care too much about it. After that I didn't feel like doing my work or anything. I wanted to go to work.

Getting youth to stay in school is difficult if courses do not have any clear connection with their occupational future or do not otherwise enrich their lives but are merely ways of accumulating credit for a credential to stay in school is not seen as a way of learning something which is of value later for a job or for enjoyment of living but a mode of getting a high school diploma that opens up the possibilities of a greater range of jobs and higher pay And in truth, it is the diploma as such not the courses, which provide the opening wedge into the educationally cleavaged upper levels of the occupational pyramid We suspect that this situation makes it more difficult to put up with school than would be the case if courses were providing something useful for later activities If high school graduation does not advantage or does not seem to advantage youth (they know (a likely occurrence where racial discrimination is involved and in our kind of economy where layoffs are likely with recurring recessions and an extending wave of declining industries) they are not likely to think of investing further time in school

This report on a group of "unemployable" dropouts is far from definitive But we have been surprised enough by our results to assert that even this type of dropout has attitudes which offer possibilities for more effective school and job adjustment We adults at present have not done much to capitalize on them. As in love and sex-making it is in the accentuation of the positive that we have a chance of eliminating the negative

Footnotes

1 The collection of the interview data reported in this paper has been supported by a contract with the New York State Division for Youth. A grant from the Social Security Administration has facilitated analysis of the data. Neither agency is responsible for the formulations presented here.

2 The term "dropout" may be a misnomer. "School leavers" is a more descriptive, and inclusive term than dropout. As pointed out later, the majority of our subjects did not drop out. The word "dropout" however, is continuously used to refer to all those who did not graduate from high school, for whatever reason, and we shall continue to employ it in this paper despite its connotation of a voluntary move.

3 S. M. Miller, "Dropouts -- A Political Problem" at a NEA symposium on dropouts, Washington, December, 1962, to be published in a volume edited by Daniel Schreiber.

4 The concept of "presently unemployable" is a difficult one to specify and apply. It means that under the present conditions of the labor market, a job is not available for this boy. It implies that the boy is difficult to place generally, but it need not indicate that the boy has no capacity for work and could never obtain a job. The use of the adverb "presently" correctly points out that "unemployability" is not an individual characteristic alone, but is related very deeply to the economic and social characteristics of the labor market. It is because in conventional thinking we have taken the labor market as it is given, that the emphasis has been on individual inadequacies for ment. The fluctuations from periods of high to low employment dem...

in the number of those thought to be "unemployable" underlines the inadequacy of the stress on personal characteristics to explain "unemployability."

5 S. M. Miller, Carolyn Comings and Betty Saleem, The Syracuse Dropout, Albany: New York State Division for Youth, 1963 (forthcoming)

6 "I" refers to the interviewer; "WDO" to a white dropout and "NDO" to a Negro dropout. Interviews averaged two hours. A limited number of the boys have so far been interviewed twice, the second time, some six months after they entered the program; some parents have been interviewed. Italics and parenthetical materials in the interview excerpts are the authors. The interview schedule and coding were primarily constructed by Dr. Arthur Pearl and his staff of the New York State Division for Youth.

7 A number of our respondents claim to have been pressured by fellow students because they were new to a school and community. In contrast to the stereotype of the friendliness of the rural life, a number of urban boys reported, as in this interview, getting a rough reception when they moved to a rural school.

8 Hylan Lewis, "Child Rearing Among Low Income Families," Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies, July, 1961, pp. 4-5.

9 Louis Yablonsky, The Violent Gang, New York: Macmillan Company, 1962, p. 78.